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ABSTRACT

This paper offers suggestions for meeting the special needs of gifted and talented (GT) students of limited English proficiency (LEP) through an extension of the differentiated curriculum. An overview of the differentiated curriculum is offered, and issues that must be addressed in meeting the needs of the GT/LEP student are discussed. Teaching strategies and methods that can be used in GT/LEP instruction, and recommended teacher characteristics, are also outlined. It is concluded that although no specific pre-packaged curriculum can be recommended to meet the needs of GT/LEP students, the criteria discussed here should be used in developing instructional strategies for this population. The curriculum, when extended using the criteria recommended here, is seen as providing the necessary foundation for both cognitive and linguistic development. (Author/MSE)

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Curriculum Extension for the Gifted and Talented Student with Limited English Proficiency

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CURRICULUM EXTENSION FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENT WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

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Abstract

This paper offers suggestions for meeting the needs of gifted and talented (GT) limited English proficient (LEP) student through an extension of the differentiated curriculum. An overview of the differentiated curriculum and issues which must be addressed in meeting the needs of the GT/LEP student are presented. Teaching strategies and methods which can be used in the instruction of GT/LEP students, as well as recommended teacher characteristics, are also included.

Although no specific prepackaged curriculum can be recommended to meet the needs of GT/LEP students, the criteria discussed in this article should be included in developing strategies which impact their instruction. The curriculum, when extended utilizing the recommended criteria, should provide the necessary foundation for cognitive and linguistic development.

Introduction

Gifted and talented (GT) children "require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program" if they are "to realize their contribution to self and society..." (Marland, 1971, p. ix) The differentiated curriculum forms the core of the gifted and talented program. Educators may, however, fail to recognize the need for a differentiated curriculum designed to meet the needs of all students identified as gifted and talented. Just as a need exists for some individualization within the regular education program, so does a need for individualization within the gifted and talented program. As more culturally and linguistically diverse students are identified as gifted and talented, the need for an appropriate educational program which considers their linguistic and cultural needs becomes a priority (Sawyer & Márquez, 1992).

When developing the appropriate differentiated curriculum for GT/LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students, educators must keep in mind that culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students share characteristics with all other gifted and talented students although there may be some differences exhibited in behaviors which emerge from the students' cultural values, needs, and interests (Kaplan, 1982). Therefore, the curriculum which is developed for gifted and talented students needs to be extended to address the linguistic and cultural needs of that population. The curriculum must be designed for both the general and specific characteristics of the gifted and talented population for whom it was intended (Kaplan, 1982).

The Differentiated Curriculum

Curriculum is defined by Sato (1988) as an organized set of purposeful experiences in school, at home, and in the community which helps students become all that their potential allows them to be. To serve the gifted/talented most effectively, "curriculum must be appropriately differentiated, articulated kindergarten through grade 12, sequential in content to be assimilated and skills to be acquired...and linked meaningfully to the regular curriculum" (Sato, 1988, p. 2). The GT curriculum should provide opportunities beyond the boundaries of the existing school and should begin with the interests and present knowledge of the student. Gifted and talented curricula should allow the student the opportunity to acquire those basic skills and concepts taught in the regular program, as well as provide opportunities for the student to expand those skills and concepts. Differentiated curricula designed to enhance the learning potential of the gifted and talented student should encourage the student to pursue topics in depth at a pace commensurate to student ability and interest, explore unforeseen tangents without the confinement of curriculum parameters, and initiate activities which diverge from the structured format within a framework of guidance and resource appropriate for such exploration. Such curricula would also allow students to ask questions about aspects of studies which could lead to even more questions; to experience emotional involvement with a project based on the students' interests and use of higher levels of ability; to learn the skills, methodology and discipline involved in intellectual and creative pursuits; to think (interpret, connect, extrapolate) and imagine (ideas, images, insights) to fully develop products; and to experience the use of intellect and senses necessary in all creative endeavors (Blanning, 1981).

Curricula for the gifted and talented student can be categorized under three basic types: accelerated, enriched, and individualized. Accelerated curricula allow GT students to move at a rapid pace through a subject or field of study. Enriched curricula consist of learning experiences with greater depth and/or breadth than the mainstream students want or need. Individualized curricula emphasize independent study on self-selected topics or interest areas (Eby & Smutney, 1990). Since gifted education programs must take into consideration the characteristics of all their students, including limited English proficient (LEP) students, it would be difficult to recommend a specific curriculum which would address the needs of all GT students. Therefore, it is advised that the characteristics and needs of the GT population which is being served in a specific district or school be assessed and that an appropriate program model be developed to meet their needs. When a curriculum model has been selected, educators should examine it closely to verify that the needs of the entire GT population, including the GT/LEP are being met.

Educators should take into consideration guidelines for judging curriculum materials and principles of differentiation for the culturally and linguistically diverse child. Gallagher and Kinney (1974) recommend, among other things, that the cultural backgrounds of children be taken into consideration not just for the benefit of the culturally different child but for all gifted children.

Meeting the Needs of GT/LEP Students

Many teachers and administrators state that they have inadequate knowledge about giftedness and gifted education. Educators also lack knowledge and training on cultural and linguistic issues which can affect the identification of culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students (Bermúdez & Rakow, 1990). In a recent research study, educators expressed hesitation and frustration at the idea of even identifying LEP students for GT programs when there was no appropriate curriculum or placement to address their unique needs (Sawyer, 1993).

Teachers involved in gifted and talented programs should examine their attitudes and expectations concerning culturally and linguistically diverse students, in general, and GT/LEP students, in particular. The inclusion of gifted and talented students with limited English proficiency in GT programs should be perceived as an opportunity to expand knowledge rather than as a burden which must be accommodated. Thorough training in multicultural, linguistic, and gifted issues would enable teachers to utilize this opportunity fully (Sawyer, Rakow, & Bermúdez, 1992).

Linguistic issues

When addressing the needs of students with limited English proficiency, teachers need to be cognizant of the stages involved in first and second language acquisition in order to support the GT/LEP student's on-going development in both languages. Providing instruction in the first language can develop skills in that language, as well as enhance the child's development in the second language (Cummins, 1981). The first language should be actively supported throughout the acquisition of the second language. Failure to maintain and continue the development of the primary language during the second language acquisition process can result in subtractive bilingualism (i.e., the loss of the primary language).

Teachers should not confuse limitations in the second language with limitations in academic cognitive ability. Teachers often have low curricular expectations for LEP students because they perceive these students as having inadequate skill development due to their being in a transitional stage between their first and second language.

The language acquisition process is facilitated by comprehensible input and social interaction. Comprehensible input refers to language which is made more understandable to the learner (Krashen, 1982). Reference to concrete materials, paraphrasing, repetition of key points, and acting out meanings are some of the ways in which speakers can help convey meaning and make language more understandable (Peregoy & Boyle, 1993).

Background knowledge

In order for students to succeed in school, they must understand academic material, and in order for students to understand academic material, they must have the appropriate background knowledge. Background knowledge, or schema, plays a crucial role in understanding language. Rummelhart (1980) states "schemata are employed in the process of interpreting sensory data (both linguistic and nonlinguistic), in retrieving information from memory, in organizing ac-

tions, in determining goals,... and generally in guiding the flow of processing in the system" (pp. 33-34). Culturally based schemas, or a lack of schemas, can interfere with full understanding of a text (Adamson, 1993). LEP students may not have the schemata necessary for full understanding of all the material to which they are exposed or for which they are responsible. All students should be provided with the appropriate support system for expanding their experiences in order to give them an extended repertoire of schemata from which to draw. In addition, the background knowledge which culturally diverse students bring with them to school should be valued and utilized to expose students to diverse points of view.

Teaching strategies and methods

The impact of teaching styles must be given serious consideration in the establishment of a positive learning environment for the GT/LEP student. Instructional methods should integrate a variety of strategies to develop thinking in all students (Sawyer, et al., 1992). Cooperative learning strategies, holistic approaches, and other non-competitive activities incorporating broad-based themes which stress multicultural issues should be included in the curriculum.

Cooperative learning provides LEP students frequent opportunities for natural second language practice and negotiation of meaning through interaction (Peregoy & Boyle, 1993; McGroarty, 1989). The tasks and group structures which are used in cooperative learning foster different types of verbal exchange, thus offering fluent speakers of a language more opportunities to tailor speech and interactions to the communicative needs of the less proficient (Gaies, 1985). This, in turn, facilitates the second language (L2) acquisition process by providing comprehensible input to the learner. In addition to the effects on language development, cooperative learning strategies can have positive effects on the social skills of all students. By requiring that all group members participate in some manner, all students have the opportunity to share in the success of the project. The students perceive themselves as an integral part of the group's success, and at the same time enhance the development of their social skills. Feelings of confidence and self-esteem are then combined with the comprehensible cooperation (Solís, 1988).

Another approach which is recommended in the extension of the curriculum to meet the needs of GT/LEP students is whole language. In whole language classrooms, children read for enjoyment and for the purpose of locating information, rather than to earn a good grade. Although teachers are available to give students the help they may need at a particular time, the children become increasingly independent in seeking their own solutions and monitoring their own performance (Cantoni-Harvey, 1992). Students in a whole language classroom "...achieve a sense of control and ownership over their own use of language and learning in school, over their own reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking...." (Goodman, 1986, p. 10). As students use language functionally and purposefully in a whole language classroom, they are also developing language. This approach is, therefore, one which could meet the needs of GT students, LEP students, and GT/LEP students.

Real life issues and related products can often be appropriately integrated into the curriculum in an effort to offer themes which are relevant to the student. Renzulli and Reis (1985) note that while textbook issues are often unmotivating

to the student, emerging topics within the cultural community such as racism, poverty, education, and politics stimulate the student and offer an opportunity to explore and incorporate cultural values in the classroom setting.

Interdisciplinary approaches should be included in a flexible curriculum which incorporates broad-based themes. The study, knowledge, and awareness of outstanding individuals in the arts, sciences, humanities, among other fields from culturally diverse groups should be considered as a component of the curriculum rather than as a separate unit. For example, George Washington Carver should be included within the context of the agricultural revolution and César Chávez within the study of unions, the mathematical contributions of the Mayans within the study of math, and so forth. The study of values could include those derived from authority, deductive logic, sense exploration, emotion, intuition, and science and how different cultures view and derive their values from each of these (Sawyer, et al., 1992).

Disciplines such as math, science, social studies, and art can be integrated into the curriculum in such a-way that important objectives are not overlooked. Mathematics offers opportunities for advancing the thinking and reasoning capabilities of gifted students, thus offering a unique area for educating GT/LEP students (Valencia, 1985). The sciences provide GT/LEP students the opportunity to extend their knowledge through the use of assigned readings, field research projects, and problem solving cognitive strategies (Valencia, 1985; Kaplan, 1982). Social studies allows for in-depth research into contemporary issues and problems and provides for leadership development through group interaction (Valencia, 1985). The visual and performing arts curriculum provides the GT/LEP student with the vehicle for artistic expression as well as developing artistic skills and dexterity (Valencia, 1985). Theater and visual arts can form a curriculum designed to "develop a sense of community, release imagination, train concentration, and sharpen awareness of the environment" (Niro & Wolf, 1982, p. 1). All of these skills and concepts should and can be developed in the GT/LEP student with appropriate individualization of the differentiated curriculum.

Success in school is related to the understanding and utilization of abstract concepts. Gifted children often excel in their ability to acquire concepts faster and to develop these concepts to higher levels of abstraction than average children. Children are able to solve many kinds of problems intuitively even though they may not be able to verbalize the process. For GT/LEP children trying to verbalize a process in English may be even more of a challenge because of their lack of proficiency in that language. Therefore, teachers should incorporate teaching techniques in which children can work on some problems without necessarily providing verbal explanations (Frasier, 1978).

The differentiated curriculum should allow all GT students, regardless of their English proficiency, the opportunity to pursue topics in depth at a pace commensurate to the students' ability and interest. LEP students should be given the option to pursue their areas of interest in either their native language or English. Resources should be made available in a variety of formats and languages in order to give LEP students the same opportunities to pursue interests which fully English proficient GT students have. The information and concepts which LEP students acquire in their first language can then be transferred to English.

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Teacher Characteristics

In order to meet the needs of limited English proficient students within the gifted and talented program, teachers must possess certain characteristics. What are the characteristics necessary to be a successful teacher of the GT/LEP student? Maker (1975) recommends that teachers of gifted students be highly intelligent, flexible, creative, and self-confident. She also states that possessing a sense of humor, being sympathetic with the problems of the gifted, and possessing a sense of self-understanding are important characteristics. Additional essential characteristics for the teachers of gifted and talented students include a high level of knowledge, well developed problem-solving and planning skills, a high energy level and enthusiasm, and a high tolerance for ambiguity (Colangelo and Exum,1981). All of these characteristics are not only essential in teaching GT students, but also in teaching LEP students.

Teachers of GT/LEP students must also possess specific skills in order to communicate effectively with culturally diverse children. Those skills identified by Kito and Lowe (1975) as necessary for effective communication include a knowledge of the individual's culture, an awareness of situations which may be culturally sensitive and knowing how to respond appropriately in such situations. An awareness of expressions to which an individual may be culturally sensitive and familiarity with figures of speech peculiar to the cultural background of the individual are important as well.

Although proficiency in the students' language(s) is not a requirement for teachers of GT/LEP students, it is certainly beneficial, especially if students are given the opportunity to pursue their interests in their first language. If the teachers of GT/LEP students are not bilingual, they should work closely with bilingual teachers or other resource personnel to ensure that LEP students have the necessary support and that the students' work is evaluate appropriately.

Teachers need to be sensitive to cultural issues, receptive to expanding their knowledge about other people, and flexible enough to accept other experiences and points of view as valid. Cultural awareness can be attained through formal training, through experiences, or through other avenues. Torrance (1975) strongly promotes the concept of students teaching teachers about their culture through informal sharing experiences. The sharing of personal experiences will enhance the opportunity for students and the educators to become more familiar with different cultural values and lifestyles.

Teachers of GT/LEP students also need to recognize the relationship of language to culture. Without language, culture cannot be acquired effectively nor can it be expressed and transmitted. There is a strong link between language and culture in the process of knowledge acquisition, as well as in the context of the whole development of young people (Trueba, 1989). Language is one of the vehicles through which people express their cultural values, their knowledge, and their experiences. Stigmas should not be attached to the student's language or to the circumstances under which it was acquired. Culturally diverse languages are different but not inferior or inadequate. In addition, language differences should not be viewed as a barrier to learning nor as limitations in ability. Teachers should also be aware that although gifted LEP students may be highly articulate in their native language, they may not be at a stage where they are able to exhibit that same ability in their second language (Valencia, 1985). Teachers

with the aforementioned characteristics should be able to meet the needs of all their students by extending and adapting the differentiated curriculum accordingly.

Conclusion

Programs and curricula should be developed for students which build upon their strengths rather than upon their deficits (Torrance, 1975). Maintaining a focus on student deficits rather than assets only serves to deny LEP students the opportunity to excel through the diversified curriculum.

Although no specific prepackaged curriculum can be recommended to meet the needs of the GT/LEP student, the criteria discussed in this article should be included in developing strategies which impact all GT students, including the GT/LEP. The curriculum, when extended utilizing the aforementioned criteria, should provide the necessary foundation for cognitive and linguistic development.

Every curriculum must have a basis for evaluation and opportunities for further development and revision. According to Passow (1986), a successful curriculum should have: experience in learning how to learn; traditional disciplines taught in both divergent and convergent ways; culturally pluralistic themes; individual and small group strategies; opportunities to enhance bilingual skills; high expectations; a community base; a climate for excellence; and ongoing staff development (Passow, 1986). These factors, along with the others which have been mentioned previously, should be considered as a basis for an exemplary curriculum designed to meet the needs of GT/LEP students.

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